

MACULA CECA

seeing, observing, appearing, looking, deluding
PhD thesis – abstract | Natalia Nowacka

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By choosing the blind spot as the subject of my PhD thesis, I focused on two topics that accompanied me in the past and inspired my visual art: space and sight.

The human eye contains *macula ceca* (*punctum caecum*, the blind spot, Mariotte blind spot), which is an empty place in the visual field. This is caused by the lack of photoreceptors in a small area of the retina, where the optic nerve is located, which leads to the brain. When the light rays focus on the blind spot, the small area of the visual field becomes empty. This phenomenon is normal and imperceptible in everyday life because the brain fills in the empty visual space with sensory data. We see the complete image because of binocular vision and symmetric placement of the blind spots in the eyes; what one eye cannot see is seen by the other eye. If this is not possible, the emptiness is filled in with the view of the environment.

The blind spot causes one type of optical illusions, whose selection is described in the thesis. However, for me, it is a parting point for insight into sight not as a physiological activity but as an experience for artists and art theorists and philosophers.

I approach the substantial theoretical subject as an outline; it is not a summary or a collection of knowledge in which I operate. It shows threads which have influenced my artistic work – a collection of graphic objects.

In the thesis chapters, I elaborate on this subject.

In *Seeing*, I describe the physical aspect of sight. By answering the question “how does the eye work?”, I briefly define two processes: impression and perception. I also describe the related argument of modern visual arts theorists on the unclear division of the roles between the eye and brain in synthesising the impression and perception.

The chapter *Observing* includes remarks on the process and dynamics of seeing. I refer to views of artists and theorists, such as Fernand Léger, Władysław Strzemiński, also historic ones, such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, to focus on *afterimage*. This is an image which becomes “imprinted” on the retina and which does not disappear immediately when the eye sees another form but which is superimposed, “remembered”, under the lids.

In *Appearing/Looking*, the selectivity of sight is described. The eye takes the image with all its flaws, aberrations, and inconsistencies. The nature of seeing has inspired many thinkers, such as one of the major postmodernism theoreticians, Wolfgang Iser. He developed *blind spot aesthetics*, according to which, “To look at means to overlook something else. There is no seeing without the blind spot”.¹ In Iser’s philosophy,

aesthetic thinking covers reality, which becomes aestheticised and perception itself becomes an aesthetic experience. The immanent part of this process is its inverse part – growing desensitisation to aesthetic sensations. According to Welsch, the blind spot should make us sensitive to exclusion, breakthroughs, and otherness.

The metaphor of “the blind spot” is also used in texts on art by another German philosopher, Theodor W. Adorno. According to him, the blind spot as a place of emptiness constitutes the complete consciousness.

In *Deluding*, I describe selected optical illusions, which bring me to the selection of means of expression which are used in the *Macula ceca* collection of graphic objects.

DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTARY OF THE PRACTICAL PART

MACULA CAECA – PREMISES

For me, *macula ceca* is a multi-dimensional space – empty yet simultaneously full of illusion; compelling, mysterious, and interesting for exploring. I treat *macula ceca* as something other, strange, peculiar, absurd; it includes paradox and manipulation with sensations.

The nature of my thesis, which allows the modification of original ideas and completion of selected concepts, connects with the search for new uses of the technique which is well-known to me – serigraphy. I wanted to broaden my technique with new materials, so I decided to create three-dimensional objects, not only two-dimensional prints. This decision was influenced by the adequacy of the form for my subject, but most importantly, by my willingness to extend my artistic experiences.

The scale of the created objects was crucial for me. In my assumptions, the collection I wanted to create was a space that engaged the viewer but was also friendly for making interactive experiments.

The means of expressions were limited by the applied ink colours. I limited them to the primary colours of cyan, magenta, and yellow. All other colours that appeared in my objects were obtained by combining the primary colours. However, the foundation was working with black and white, the gradient which was created by thickening lines.

The lines creating the surface were the most concise and apt choice of means of expression to build my works. Even though it cannot be seen at first sight, the majority of the stencils I used were made on the basis of hand drawings. The complicated compositions were laboriously created and dictated by the parallelism of the lines and the similar pressure of the tool with which I drew on the film. All that made the hours' long process similar to meditation.

Macula ceca, the blind spot, as defined by me, means a space of visual activity; a space which becomes a set of seemingly unrelated objects.

When I worked on them, it was essential for me to create a foundation for interpretation rather than a closed and predetermined artistic production.

For me, the most important part of this collection lies beyond the established functioning scheme between the objects and the audience.

MACULA CAECA – OBJECT LIST:

¹Wolfgang Welsch, *Grenzgänge der Ästhetik*, Stuttgart, 1996, p. 58 (translated after quotation in:) Magdalena Willems-Pisarek, *Teza W. Welscha o modelowej roli sztuki dla współczesnej rzeczywistości i myśli filozoficznej na tle inspiracji późną filozofią L. Wittgensteina*, *Sztuka i Filozofia* 22/23, 230-252 2003, available at Muzeum Historii Polski, http://bazhum.muzhp.pl/media/files/Sztuka_i_Filozofia/Sztuka_i_Filozofia-r2003-t22_23-s230-252/Sztuka_i_Filozofia-r2003-t22_23-s230-252.pdf

1. FORTEL (STRATAGEM) 125 × 92 cm /serigraphy on paper/ 2017
2. FORMA 1 (FORM 1) 100 × 110 cm /graphical object, mixed media, serigraphy, mirror film/ 2018
3. POZORY (APPEARANCES) 150 × 190 cm /serigraphy, mirror film/ 2017
4. LINIA BRZEGOWA (COAST LINE) 92 × 140 cm /serigraphy on self-adhesive paper, PVC board, synthetic band/ 2018
5. TEORIA FORMY OTWARTEJ (OPEN FORM THEORY) 90 × 130 cm /serigraphy on self-adhesive paper, steel sheet, magnets/ 2017
6. OBIEKT (OBJECT) 120 × 110 cm /serigraphy on self-adhesive paper, PVC, rubber/ 2017/2018
7. 3 MAJA/10 LUTEGO (MAY 3/FEBRUARY 10) 100 × 150 cm /serigraphy on self-adhesive paper, band/ 2017/2018
8. FRAGMENTY WIELKIEGO PLANU (FRAGMENTS OF THE GREAT PLAN) 120 × 170 cm /serigraphy on self-adhesive paper, steel sheet, magnets/ 2018
9. SEN RICHARDA H. (RICHARD H.'S DREAM) 69 × 100 cm (module) / graphical object, serigraphy, PVC, wood, metal/ 2018/2019
10. PEJZAŻ 644 (LANDSCAPE 644) 68 × 196 cm /serigraphy on paper, plexiglass, particle board/ 2018
11. DYLEMAT (DILEMMA) 115 × 180 cm /serigraphy on film/ 2018
12. MIEJSCE PORUSZEŃ (PLACE OF MOVING/BLURRING) 18 × 70 cm (module) /serigraphy on self-adhesive paper, PVC/ 2018
13. PATRZ ILE SIŁ W OCZACH (LOOK AS HARD AS YOU CAN) ca. 110 × 160 cm (module 42 × 64 cm) /serigraphy on self-adhesive paper, steel sheet/ 2018

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